# **International Assistance**

ICH-04-Report – Form



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**United Nations** Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization • Heritage

Intangible Cultural .

## **INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE** INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE FUND

## **FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT**

## **Beneficiary State Party:**

Project title:	Safeguarding of the traditional knowledge for the protection of sacred natural sites in the territory of the Jaguars of Yurupari, Vaupes department, Colombia
Time frame:	Starting date: 01/06/2017 Completion date: 28/02/2018
Budget:	Total: US\$50.933,26 Including: Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund: US\$25.000 State Party contributions: US\$15.000
	Other contributions: US\$10.933,26
Implementing agency:	Fundación Gaia Amazonas
Implementing partners:	ICH Work Group, Heritage Office - Ministry of Culture
Contact person:	Title (Ms/Mr, etc.): Mr. Family name: Ortiz Given name: Nelson Institution/position: Asesor Fundación Gaia Amazonas Address: Cra. 17 # 39-73 Telephone number: 1- 7723542 E-mail address: nortiz@gaiaamazonas.org

## **Background and rationale**

Provide a brief description of the situation existing at the time of the request and the need that the assistance aimed to address. For safeguarding of a particular element, provide a description of the element, its viability and why safeguarding measures were required. For preparation of inventories, strengthening of capacities, awareness-raising, visibility or other safeguarding not focussed on a particular element, identify gaps that were to be addressed. For emergency assistance requests, describe the nature and severity of the emergency at the time of the request.

Not fewer than 750 or more than 1000 words

The Traditional Knowledge of Jaguar Shamans of Yuruparí - Hee Yaia Keti Oka - is a thousand-year-old, holistic knowledge, held by the ethnic groups belonging to the Tucano Oriental and Arawak linguistic families, located in the Northwest Amazon region. In Colombia, this linguistic family can be found in the Vaupés and Apaporis river basins, where the Pirá-Paraná river, in the south of Vaupés department and bordering Brazil, acts as a connector.

The traditional indigenous cultural knowledge of ethnic groups that inhabit the area is one of the best preserved in the Colombian Amazonian due, among other reasons, to the inaccessibility of the territory. Along the Pirá Paraná, for example, almost 100% of the population speak their own languages. Hee Yaia Keti Oka is "an organic system of knowledge that contains all the wisdom for managing the territory and life. It is used for the benefit of nature and human beings, so that people can live well and develop spiritually. The supreme knowledge of the Jaguars of Yuruparí is essential for being to relate to the territory in an orderly and healthy way. The term Hee Yaia ~ kubua symbolizes a specialization of traditional wisdom; it refers to the person who has and can handle the wisdom of Hee or Yuruparí, for keeping the balance of energy in the territory" (extract from the ACAIPI Special Safeguarding Plan of Hee Yaia Keti Oka).

Hee Yaia Keti Oka is understood as all the power of Wisdom-Knowledge (Keti Oka) that is concentrated in the Jaguar spirits of Yuruparí (Hee Yaia). These beings are considered the spirit guardians of knowledge about sacred places and elements, which the knowledge-holders use for carrying out healing for the wellbeing or humans and the environment, at different times of the year. The spiritual task of the Jaguars of Yuruparí is organized around great ritual celebrations that are carried out according to their calendar of cultural and ritual activities, in harmony with the changes that occur in nature during the annual cycle. This makes it possible to prevent and safeguard against diseases and problems, and promote actions to purify the environment for wellbeing.

Hee Wii, the main ritual of this knowledge system, is a sacred activity that is carried out to explore the ancestral world, in which very complex and profound knowledge is transmitted for the safeguarding of life itself. The ritual is accompanied by secret and special ceremonies that demand prolonged and strict diets.

This sacred ritual, essential for the healing of the territory, is the way in which the indigenous people of Pirá Paraná spiritually renew their link with their story of origin and with the knowledge for keeping environmental balance within the territory. Traditional healings and preventions with Hee are essential for the caring and restoration of nature, and for people to have good health and a good life.

Guidance from the Hee Yaia Keti Oka wisdom is focused on the preservation and conservation of the environment and the territory, and the safeguarding of sacred sites - places of origin and key points for reproduction and the abundance of nature.

The sacred sites are interconnected in different ways, forming a system of healing routes that are travelled by the mind (thinking) of the Jaguar Shamans of Yuruparí during their rituals. These routes are linked to the governance and protection of all biocultural diversity of the territory; the healing done by the knowledge-holders, generates a protection that controls any evil that haunts the territory. In this way also the ~kubua do preventative work,

for the health and wellbeing of people and all of nature.

This wisdom and knowledge are transmitted through traditional education, the stories of origin, and the advice and inherited knowledge of grandparents. The system of knowledge transmission is managed from the maloca, the great ceremonial house, the epicenter for the implementation of traditional training processes through daily activities (hunting, fishing, food gathering, elaboration of crafts, etc) and rituals. This teaching is deepened by sacred ceremonies for the cultural strengthening of present and future generations.

Although in the past all the ethnic groups of this great region of the northwest Amazon were immersed in this system of cultural knowledge, nowadays it is only kept alive in the Pirá Paraná, Apaporis and Mirití rivers, in the Colombian departments of Amazonas and Vaupes; and it is the ethnic groups of the Pirá Paraná river who preserve and practice it most rigorously.

Nonetheless, the increasingly continuous relationship of the Pirá Paraná communities with Western thinking and ways of life - represented in the area by their settlement in single-family, permanent dwellings (formerly in malocas), the use of names and surnames in Spanish, the cash economy, among other factors - has caused changes in the traditional social organization, weakening cultural spaces and procedures for the transmission of ancestral knowledge. Many young people today distance themselves from their traditions and knowledge systems, losing the opportunity to learn from the elders about their sacred geography, the basis of traditional governance and healing of the territory.

This situation jeopardizes the integrity of the sacred sites and consequently of this entire cultural element, since new generations do not understand the value of sacred sites for the health of people and the balance of nature. In the face of growing threats to these sites, such as mining (whether legal or illegal), the younger generations do not lead or support actions to protect their territory and safeguard their cultural heritage.

The project is a strategy to safeguard the integrity of this cultural element. Previously, many young people from different ethnic communities did not know which were the most important sacred sites of each ethnic territory and which ones merit special protection; and were ignorant of the stories and cultural norms for relating appropriately with their ancestral territory.

#### **Objectives and results attained**

Overall, to what extent did the project attain its objectives? Describe the main results attained, focussing in particular on the perspective of the direct beneficiaries and communities. For each expected result identified in the request, explain whether it was fully or partially attained. Also describe any unexpected results, direct or indirect, whether positive or negative.

Not fewer than 100 or more than 500 words

Satisfactory progress is being made, through the expeditions to sacred sites and the recording and writing of cultural information about the myths of origin, the characteristics, and the ecological and spiritual importance of the sacred places in the ancestral territories of the ethnic groups of the Pirá Paraná river.

Expected Result 1: 24 youth, aged between 18 and 30 years, will be trained as apprentices by the traditional authorities (in the research, recognition and characterization of sacred sites in their ancestral territories). Partially attained.

The traditional knowledge-holders of each ethnic group have provided young people with information on the importance of sacred natural sites for regulating socio-environmental aspects of the territory and their role in "traditional healing". They have informed about the specific ancestral norms that should be respected for relating appropriately with each of these sites; and have explained to the young researchers about the environmental

consequences and the human health problems that will manifest if there is infringement of this special regime of ancestral governance.

Expected Result 2: Promotion of the intergenerational transmission of a deeper knowledge about the sacred places (their origin, characteristics, history and importance within the traditional system of territorial management) through the exchange between traditional knowledge-holders and youth. Partially attained.

The expeditions by the youth to the most emblematic places of each territory, under the guidance of the elders, the accompaniment and guidance provided by the latter during the transcription of the recorded information into their own languages, and the elaboration of detailed maps of the ethnic territories, are all effective as intercultural strategies for the learning and intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge. Despite the difficulty involved in writing in their own languages, the young researchers are gaining knowledge and skills about cultural protocols for relating with elders, writing in their own languages, interpretation of their own concepts into Spanish. They are gaining a profound understanding of the sacred geography, and receiving thousand-year old knowledge from their elders for the recognition and characterization of the sacred sites. This motivates them to bond in a deeper way, commit to the protection of the territory, and contribute to safeguarding Hee Yaia Keti Oka.

Expected Result 3: To share and foster the traditional knowledge within the communities involved, and among local and national entities, through the development of six bilingual (native language - Spanish) illustrated booklets. In progress.

Documents are being written, in their own language, with detailed information and drawings on each of the sacred sites visited during the expeditions through their territories. A workshop with the traditional knowledge-holders and local research groups has led to progress in the information generated by each group is being systematized, and elements for graphic design, for a first consensus edition.

## **Description of project implementation**

Provide a description of the activities undertaken and the outputs they generated (e.g. trainings, consultation process, technical assistance, awareness raising, publications, toolkits, etc.) Also describe any problems encountered in project delivery and corrective actions taken. Describe the role of the implementing agency and implementing partners in carrying out activities and generating outputs.

Not fewer than 1000 or more than 1500 words

ACAIPI's endogenous research program, which articulates the safeguarding of traditional knowledge, the holistic model of shamanism and traditional governance for protecting the sacred sites in each ancestral territory, first began in the Pirá Paraná river in 2011, after the inclusion of Hee Yaia Keti Oka in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2010). The Special Safeguarding Plan (PES- Plan Especial de Salvguardia) presented by ACAIPI to the Colombian Ministry of Culture, and approved by Resolution 1690 of 2010, considers local research as one of the main lines of action.

"Endogenous research process: cross-cutting, we will continue with the strengthening of our own research groups and dynamics, to enhance intergenerational relations and continue recovering ancestral knowledge for environmental governance and good coexistence". (extract from PES Strategic Lines of Action, ACAIPI).

This small research project on the sacred sites of ethnic groups of the Pirá Paraná river was initially presented to the UNESCO Small Grants program in 2013, with the support of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Office of the Colombian Ministry of Culture.

In expectation of UNESCO cooperation, and keen to advance in the implementation of the defined strategy, ACAIPI used its own resources, the technical and financial support of Gaia

Amazonas and the support of small projects - initially from Intangible Cultural Heritage, and later from the Colombian Ministry of Culture's National Program of Cultural Coordination – to advance with different training and preparatory activities for the local groups of Environmental Investigative Agents (AIA- Agentes Investigadores Ambientales). In particular:

1. The selection of the young researchers from each ethnic groups and ancestral territory of the Pirá Paraná.

2. Unification of an alphabet for the writing of Pirá Paraná languages (belonging to the Tucano Oriental linguistic family) through the evaluation of different writing proposals previously developed by linguists, missionaries and state institutions. This unified alphabet is now being used by all communities, local research groups and educational centers in the area.

3. Training in basic aspects of Information and Communication Technologies for the management of digital recorders, personal computers, cameras and GPS, as well as training to organize files and logs of the digital information.

4. Writing exercises in their own languages, for the transcription of small digital recordings made with traditional knowledge-holders. This activity has become more complex and expansive over time, with the development of more local research.

5. Writing exercises in Spanish, accompanied by professional anthropologists and pedagogues, based on the translation of texts and local research (e.g. The Territory of the Jaguars of Yurupari: Traditional Knowledge of the Pirá Paraná river ethnicities for the care of the environment. ACAIPI and Fundación Gaia Amazonas 2015. Editors N. Ortiz and B. Santos)

6. Training of local groups in cartography and the production of social and technical maps with two-dimensional geographical spatiality, scales and regional/global referencing.

7. Exercises of analysis and edition of information.

Project development

A. Fieldwork: 6 journeys to the sacred sites to collect knowledge about their origin, characteristics, history and importance within the traditional system of territorial management (one journey per ancestral territory)

- Acquisition of materials and work equipment

The Pira Paraná river basin is located in the south of the Colombian department of Vaupés; it is geographically remote, without roadways of any continuous waterways for connection with an urban centre. The only way for communities to reach Mitú (capital of Vaupés) is by air, on express flights, which are expensive. The local indigenous population depend on available seats on the occasional flights contracted by ACAIPI or any other entity that carries out activities in the area.

In mid-June, the indigenous coordinator of the ACAIPI research program went to Mitú (in a flight paid by ACAIPI), to buy and send the work materials required by local groups for the development of their project activities.

- Planning workshop, and distribution of materials

During 20-23 June in San Luis community, the first scheduled workshop was held for planning and coordination of project activities - attended by all members of the local research groups, the indigenous coordinators of the research program, representatives of the local authorities, and the advisor Nelson Ortiz of Gaia Amazonas. This workshop was funded by ACAIPI with state funds for indigenous resguardos (territories). The objectives were: to socialise details of the project "Safeguarding Traditional Knowledge for the Protection of Sacred Natural Sites in the Territory of the Jaguars of Yuruparí" with its final adjustments; define the routes and specific places for expeditions in each ethnic territory;

develop a detailed chronogram of each route; and deliver the materials and equipment requested by each of the research groups. At the beginning of the workshop Nelson Ortiz gave a detailed account of the objectives, goals, specific products, delivery dates of reports and products, and the budget. He informed that, as requested by ACAIPI, Gaia Amazonas would administer the funds transferred by UNESCO, in accordance with the budget plan established by ACAIPI. The local coordinator of the research program, Daniel León, reported on the funding that ACAIPI was providing for the development of the activity.

Afterwards, traditional knowledge-holders justified the importance of the expeditions, for the youth of each ethnic group to know their most important sacred sites. They expressed the need to make the " agreements with the spirit guardians of the sacred places before starting the expeditions, to avoid accidents, especially from lightning." They explained that many spirit guardians do not allow photographic records, so for some sites only drawings would be made. Finally, they recommended summer for making the expeditions, since there is a greater risk of accidents in the rainy season. Local leaders reviewed the members who had been selected by the communities for each of the local groups.

## - Carrying out the expeditions

Expeditions were carried out within the territories of the Tatuyo, Eduria, Barasana, ~ Kobe ~ hidoria, and Makuna ethnic groups. The Itana ethnic group researchers had to cancel the activity because, at the beginning of the expedition, one of its environmental researchers suffered an ophidic accident, a snake-bite. However, the Itana group, made up of young people from three communities near the Comeña rapids, met for several days and developed the work of recording and transcribing information provided by the traditional knowledge-holder on sacred sites.

## B. Field information processing (initial stage)

The research groups of each community transcribed the detailed information provided by the traditional informants, they made drawings and maps of each of the sacred sites and maps of the routes of the sacred sites visited during the expeditions through their territories.

## C. Field information processing (final stage)

## - Workshop for information processing

This workshop that took place during 9-22 October and allowed for the digitization on personal computers of the information generated during the expeditions and in the ethnic communities by each research group - in local languages and in Spanish. The groups of environmental researchers were supported by an interdisciplinary team of professionals, including: Dr. Stephen Hugh Jones, prestigious academic, former Dean of the Faculty of Anthropology of the University of Cambridge, and speaker of the languages of the area; professionals in art and text editing, from the company Efecto Mariposa, hired for the editorial production of the booklets; and a cartographer from Gaia Amazonas. Each group of young researchers, with support from their elders, had the opportunity to share the results of their research. (See the Minutes of the San Miguel Community Workshop, Oct 9-22, 2017).

## D. Editorial Production

During this period of time the general coordinator selected the entity that would carry out the editing, graphic design and the layout of the six booklets on sacred sites - taking into account professional profile, experience, and prior experience working in the area of the Pirá Paraná river. He also selected the educational consultant to accompany the workshop for the final processing of information. He formulated terms of reference for the hiring of

these positions, and coordinated the preparation of contracts with Gaia Amazonas. Both the editorial production team and the education specialist held meetings to discuss the goals and expected results of the project, to design the methodologies, and plan in detail the Information Systematization and Editing Workshop, at which a Gaia Amazonas cartographer also attended.

E, Follow-up and evaluation:

- Intermediate monitoring

During 7 August to 7 September, the traditional coordinator of ACAIPI's Environment sector, Reynel Ortega, joined other leaders of the Association to make a monitoring visit to some of the communities of the lower Pirá Paraná. He met with local groups to clarify doubts and assess their progress in the development of activities, and – in accordance with traditional protocols - conversed with traditional knowledge-holders of the communities during night sessions in the malocas to reflect with them on the importance of the project for strengthening territorial governance and the cultural safeguarding of Hee Yaia Keti Oka.

#### Community involvement

Provide a description of the mechanisms used for fully involving the community(ies) concerned. Describe not only the participation of the communities as beneficiaries of financial support, but also their active participation in the planning and implementation of all activities.

Not fewer than 300 or more than 500 words

ACAIPI's endogenous research program is developed in a context where all ethnic groups of the Pirá Paraná are mobilized around the task of cultural strengthening and reviving the transmission of ancestral knowledge. The participation of young people is encouraged, so that they themselves - guided by traditional knowledge-holders - lead the activities to recover their history and identity as the foundation for solving environmental, social and cultural problems.

Since the first consultations, the communities have been involved in:

- Socializing, among all the population of the Pirá Paraná river, the decision of the traditional authorities to investigate, record and write traditional knowledge, in order to clarify the reasons that have prompted the knowledge-holders to make public the knowledge which has always been transmitted in a confidential manner, between them and their disciples, and has retained a profound character of secrecy.

- Encouraging the participation of all social sectors of the ACAIPI population, defining research plans, and preparing protocols to facilitate communication and the availability of local knowledge, and allow the recording of information.

- Conforming research teams, representative of the different ethnic groups and languages of the area, coordinated by traditional knowledge-holders and leaders of each territory.

- Research and the compilation of cultural information, to understand the dynamics and the management of the territory and strengthen the culture.

These activities involved the ACAIPI Coordinating Committee, the Assembly of Traditional Captains, advisors from Gaia Amazonas, the research groups of different ethnic groups, linguistic and cartography experts, and the population in general.

As previously mentioned, local research is one of the strategic lines prioritized in the Special Safeguarding Plan (PES) of Hee Yaia Keti Oka, which was developed with the participation of all the communities. This project was designed following the recommendations of the traditional knowledge-holders and leaders who guide the development of the Local Research Program, within the framework of the PES. Decisions about project design and

implementation, the specific goals, the methodological procedures, the information that is recorded, the sacred places that are visited and the people who participate, are taken by the legitimate representatives of the communities together with the indigenous coordinators of the program.

In addition, activities are carried out solely within the communities of the area, and the economic benefits through scholarships or any payments are destined for leaders who belong exclusively to the communities of the Pirá Paraná river.

The research groups use local meetings to socialize the activities developed and the results achieved with their own communities. Upon completion of the project a general meeting will be held of the Assembly of Traditional Authorities of all communities, funded by ACAIPI, where a full report on project implementation will be submitted, and all deliverables will be presented (six bilingual brochures with cartographic information, with recognition of ACAIPI copyright and intellectual property rights).

#### Sustainability and exit/transition strategy

Describe how the benefits of the project will continue after the project has been completed. Where appropriate, describe the steps undertaken to ensure the following:

- Sustainability of activities, outputs and results, including with reference to how capacity has been built under the project. Also describe any planned follow-up measures to ensure sustainability.
- Additional funding secured as a result of this project, if any. Indicate by whom, how much and for what purpose the contributions are granted.
- Describe how the ownership (of activities, outputs, results) by stakeholders and the community(ies) in particular has been promoted.
- Describe, if relevant, how tools, processes, outputs, etc. have been adopted, adapted, replicated and/or extended for future use (e.g. in other regions, communities, elements, or fields of intangible cultural heritage.).

Not fewer than 100 or more than 500 words

The learning and editorial products generated by the project will have long-term impacts that contribute to the sustainability of the strategy designed by ACAIPI for the protection of sacred sites and the safeguarding of the cultural element, in the following ways:

The final booklets, with information provided directly by the traditional knowledge-holders of each ethnic group on the most important sacred sites within the jurisdiction of ACAIPI, will serve as reference material and key input for the design of pedagogical material. They will be used in ACAIPI's programs of environmental education and by the local schools in the communities of the Pirá Paraná river.

The information and learning generated will strengthen the environmental governance of the ethnic groups and communities that comprise ACAIPI, by enabling appropriate decision-making and the ability to respond effectively to situations that threaten the territory and can impact the sacred sites. This in turn affects the safeguarding of their holistic system of cultural knowledge.

Greater awareness is generated among the younger population of all ethnic groups, on the importance of conserving the material and immaterial values of their culture Hee Yaia Keti Oka; and this encourages young people to approach the elders and knowledge-holders. They are also trained in the preparation of documents that will be very useful in the future to empower their efforts in defence of the territory.

## Lessons learnt

Describe what are the key lessons learnt regarding the following:

- Attainment of expected results
- Ownership of key stakeholders and community involvement
- Delivery of project outputs
- Project management and implementation
- Sustainability of the project after the financial assistance

Not fewer than 300 or more than 750 words

- Attainment of expected results and delivery of project outputs

This is a mid-term report and final products are not yet available. However, work is in progress to deliver the project outputs. As explained above, progress has been made in all the expected results of the project. It is important to highlight that the project has fostered the implementation of intercultural alternatives for learning ancestral knowledge by the young people, which reinforce the traditional dynamics of knowledge transmission, and motivates them to link in a more profound and committed way with the protection of the territory; and contributes to the safeguarding of cultural knowledge Hee Yaia Keti Oka.

For the editorial production of six bilingual booklets on sacred sites, progress has been made through expeditions to the sacred sites of each ancestral territory, the recording of information supplied by the knowledge-holders, the preliminary transcription in own language, and the systematization in personal computers. Editing and graphic design of the booklets has not yet begun.

- Ownership of key stakeholders and community involvement

In addition to the ethnic and linguistic diversity that characterizes the Pira Paraná area, the social composition of these localities is very heterogeneous in terms of age ranges, Spanish language skills or cultural specializations, among many other aspects. Long-term processes and appropriate pedagogical strategies have been put in place so that all social sectors in the communities, both children, young people, and elder men and women can appropriately and equitably participate in the activities.

Although planned phases of socialization have been carried out - in each locality and through the General Assembly of Authorities - a lesson learned in this regard is the need to monitor and manage opportunities for the continuity of traditional knowledge safeguarding strategies and of the sacred sites of the territory of the Jaguars of Yuruparí. This will ensure that more and more people from this river and neighbouring areas are involved in protecting the cultural and natural heritage of the Pira Paraná river.

- Project management and implementation:

Thanks to the local research programs that ACAIPI has implemented in recent years, which have been focused mainly on groups of young researchers representing different ethnic groups, the Association has acquired the necessary capacities to implement endogenous research projects with autonomy and responsibility. However, given the complex sociocultural context and the project outputs, it requires committed institutional allies, a high level of expertise and trustworthiness from the communities to secure funding opportunities, to achieve the objectives, and to comply with the formal requirements of institutional projects in periods as short as one year.

- Sustainability of the project after financial assistance

ACAIPI has many expectations regarding the usefulness of editorial products from the implementation of this project. However, it has been difficult to secure resources for the printing and dissemination of booklets or books, produced in an endogenous and autonomous way by local groups in the communities and educational centers of the area.

An important lesson relates to the need for financial opportunities for the publication and dissemination of editorial products, which can allow the immediate continuity of ACAIPI's strategy for the safeguarding of traditional knowledge for the governance of the sacred sites of the territory of the Jaguars of Yuruparí.

The information and learning generated by the project, the transmission of knowledge and the inter-generational exchange, will strengthen the capacities of the ethnic groups and communities in terms of appropriate decision-making. It will enable them to respond effectively to situations and threats to the territory and sacred sites. This in turn will have a positive impact on the safeguarding of their holistic system of cultural knowledge.

## Annexes

List the annexes and documentation included in the report:

- publications, evaluation reports and other outputs, when applicable
- progress reports prepared during the contract period
- list of major equipment provided under the project and status after termination of contract period
- other (please specify)

1- REPORT ON THE PLANNING AND SYSTEMATIZATION WORKSHOP FOR THE UNESCO RESEARCH PROJECT, SAN LUIS COMMUNITY, 20-24 JUNE 2017

2- REPORT ON THE SISTEMATIZATION WORKSHOP OF THE EXPEDITIONS TO SACRED SITES BY ETHNIC GROUPS OF THE PIRA PARANA RIVER. SAN MIGUEL COMMUNITY, 9-22 OCTOBER 2017.

Name and signature of the person having completed the report		
Name: Nelson Ortiz A		
Title: Asesor senior		
Date: 7-11-2017		
Signature:		